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Dermond Peterson's Stunning, Milwaukee-Made Textiles



Some of the most stunning textiles sold across the country are created by hand in a studio on National Avenue. Dermond Peterson textiles Design, created in 2001 by Susan Peterson and her sister Sandra Dermond, adorns the choicest of boutiques and design magazines from *Metropolitan Home* to *The New York Times*. In her airy, Spartan studio, sheaths of white natural linens ablaze with brightly hued organic images—basil, ferns, coral, shrimp—sprawl on long tables and hang to dry. They will become exquisite tablecloths, runners, pillowcases, and napkins. Articulate and intellectual, Peterson speaks about the inspirations that have steered her life and art.

What is your personal background?

I grew up in Glenwood, Minn., a farming community of 2,700. I went to Carleton College, and later got an MFA at the University of Illinois-Chicago. It was a very conceptual program. Afterwards, I organized a visiting artists' group matching us with Chicago public school teachers. Then I got certified and taught fifth grade. It was the best job in the world. Most of my students were from Latino neighborhoods. If I had had exactly the same high-risk kids from the same socioeconomic environment but had only 24 of them, and not 32 in a class, I would never have left.

How did your teaching fit into your design work?

I developed art-integrated curricula for kids who were befuddled by numbers. Math is a language for describing the world. So is visual art. I used printmaking to teach them how to factor 24 through grids and graphs and patterns. Meanwhile, I was doing prints at home—making napkins for Christmas gifts. My sister said, "We could sell these." I didn't know how to do business and marketing—that was my sister's strength. She lived in Milwaukee, so we began selling here to George Watts, then went to the New York International Gift Fair. We got into the juried division without a wait. I quit teaching and moved here.

How do you develop your designs?

We talk about what's next—not what's now. We study the competition. You can't be too far ahead. We began with culinary images, then sea stuff, then flora, then color abstracts, then garden patterns. Our next group will be insects.

Do you like being in business?

Yes, you make your own schedule. You're autonomous, like being a teacher. I like the structure of being at my studio. I like the conceptual part of being an entrepreneur. I love the trade shows in New York where everyone takes care of each other. It's like being an artist in a way.

For more information, visit www.dermondpeterson.com

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